

Remarks/Arguments

Summary

Claims 15-19 have been amended, claim 20 has been cancelled, and new claims 21-22 have been added. Claims 15-19 and 21-22 are pending for consideration.

Claim Rejections - 35 U.S.C. § 102/103

The Office Action rejected claims 15-17 and 20 as being anticipated by Hasegawa et. al (U.S. Patent No. 5,795,399). The rejection is respectfully traversed for at least the following reasons.

The Office Action states that Hasegawa et al. discloses “an air purge line (extending from 34; column 4, rows 50-60) connected with said load lock chamber wherein said air purge line supplies air including H₂O gas.” In reality, the air purge line of amended claim 15 is completely different from the line extending from 34 in Hasegawa. Whereas the line extending from 34 in Hasegawa is specifically designed to provide *unidirectional* air flow, the air purge line of claim 15 is adapted to provide at least bi-directional air flow. In other words, the air purge line of claim 15 can both supply and exhaust gas whereas the line connected to element 34 in Hasegawa only supplies gas.

The fact that the line extending from 34 in Hasegawa only supplies gas is apparent in the description given in column 4, lines 39-61 and illustrated in Figure 3 of Hasegawa. Element 34 comprises a ventilator supplying outer air to a load-lock chamber (See, Hasegawa at column 4, lines 60-61). The air is

sucked out of the load-lock chamber by “vacuum pumping equipments” using an exhaust line at an opposite end of the load-lock chamber (See, Hasegawa at column 4, lines 39-41). The disclosed vacuum pumping equipments function by “reducing the pressure in the load-lock chamber 1 through an exhaust port” (See, column 4, lines 40-41). Other than reducing pressure using the vacuum pumping equipments, Hasegawa utterly fails to disclose any additional air control flow mechanism for the disclosed system. Hence, according to the disclosure of Hasegawa, there is nothing that would allow or even suggest the possibility of gas being exhausted through the line extending from 34.

Since the air purge line of amended claim 15 is clearly different from the line extending from 34 in Hasegawa, the rejection of claim 15 is improper and should be withdrawn.

Claims 16 and 17 depend from claim 15 and should be allowed for at least the reasons given above in relation to claim 15.

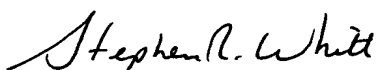
The Office Action also rejected claims 18-19 as being obvious over Hasegawa in view of Shimada et al. (U.S. Patent No. 5,735,961). Claims 18-19 depend from claim 15 and hence they should likewise be allowed for at least the reasons given above in relation to claim 15.

Conclusion

No other issues remaining, reconsideration of amended claims 15-19 is requested. A favorable action on pending claims 15-19 and 21-22 is also requested.

Respectfully submitted,

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